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NOTICES OF NEW BOOKS.

La Philosophie d'E. Boutroux. Par A. P. FONTAINE. Paris, 6 Place de la Sorbonne, Librairie Joseph Vrin, 1920.—pp. iv, 87.

This little book is one of a series projected by the author on "La Culture Française" that is to contain similar volumes on the philosophies of Bergson, Le Dantec, Renouvier, etc. The purpose is to give a succinct account of the achievements of contemporary French philosophy and at the same time to emphasize the originality and value of its contributions. No one can doubt that a most important philosophical movement has gone on in France during the past generation. It is true also that the outside philosophical world will be helped in understanding this movement by such studies as M. Fontaine has furnished in the little volume before us. If I were to venture a criticism of his programme, it would be that he does not mention M. Fouillée, who deserves, I think, the central place in any account of recent contributions to philosophy by French writers.

M. Fontaine gives a brief sketch of the life and philosophical works of Professor Boutroux, setting forth at the same time the prevailing fashion of thought in France about 1875, when he began to write. "Philosophy was more and more identified with science. Science, on its side, was represented as a necessary series of demonstrated truths and established laws, of which the most perfect form was the science of mathematics. The world was each day seen to be subjected to an inevitable determinism of which mathematical necessity seemed to be the most accurate expression" (p. ii). It was against this background that Professor Boutroux developed his "Philosophie de la Contingence." As M. Fontaine points out, Boutroux is both an historian of philosophy and a constructive thinker, and he has laid the basis for his metaphysics of freedom by a detailed criticism of determinism in various philosophical systems and particularly of the claims of mathematical mechanism in its scientific form. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this criticism at the time it was undertaken, and it required no small degree of courage on the part of a young writer to set himself in opposition to the ruling dogmatism of science. Similarly, no one can doubt the great service that Professor Boutroux has rendered to philosophy through the long series of writings in which he has maintained an idealistic view of the world, and defended the moral and religious experiences from the confident and superficial interpretations of naturalism. It is true that he did not stand alone: one may say that he is a representative of an important French tradition in philosophy which seeks to set a limit to the principle of

mathematical necessity by recognizing a realm of 'indeterminism' or 'contingency' that is unaffected by it. Thus M. Fontaine points out (p. 76) that neither Comte nor his disciple Littré maintained a system of monistic determinism, while the emphasis upon free will and contingency is central in writers like Maine de Biran, Renouvier and Ravaisson. It is of course to this tradition also that the philosophy of Bergson attaches itself. 'Absolute beginnings,' 'contingency,' 'freedom from determination,' are set up as cities of refuge to which one may flee from the dominion of necessary law.

As time has gone on it has, I think, become increasingly clear that the claims of idealism do not rest upon the reservation of any part of experience from the system of laws that express the rationality of the universe. It is in vain to challenge the dictum that 'the real is the rational.' The problem is that of coming to appreciate the nature of reason. Those who quote this proposition from Hegel in order to criticise it usually overlook the fact that he lays equal emphasis upon its converse, that the rational is the real. M. Fontaine, who vigorously defends science against his author, insists that knowledge which does not tend toward scientific verification is for us of no value. But if that be granted, it by no means follows that this 'scientific verification' shall be limited by the categories of mechanical science. There are other forms of comprehensibility. It is doubtless essential in philosophy to protest against receiving what is in principle incomprehensible. But the limits of reason are not set by the mechanical system: reason is in principle the universal capacity which finds for each phase of reality its own proper expression of comprehensibility. Professor Boutroux sees truly that philosophy demands a different form of comprehensibility from the sciences.

It is not true, I think, as M. Fontaine seems to assume, that Boutroux means to deny the possibility of an intelligible and verifiable view of the world. His view of the different orders of reality and their interrelations presupposes such an intelligible view. Indeed, at times he approaches to the view of degrees of reality and of the mind as a developing system of categories that renders unnecessary and unmeaning the whole conception of 'contingency.' Perhaps it was the unfortunate influence of this word, which seems to have been adopted directly from Aristotle, that prevented Professor Boutroux from realizing that freedom is not in principle opposed to determinism, but that 'the truth of determinism is Freedom.'

J. E. C.